



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 10, 2009

CONTACT: Kimberly Smith, (202) 225-6906
Kim.Smith@mail.house.gov

**Statement of Judiciary Committee Ranking Member Lamar Smith,
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
“Hearing on Implementation of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act”**

Ranking Member Smith: This past weekend, on Saturday afternoon, 13-year-old Esme Kenney from Ohio went for a jog in her neighborhood. She took her usual route along a water reservoir near her house. Tragically, Esme never made it home. Her body was found on Sunday morning.

Local police have arrested 40-year-old Anthony Kirkland for her murder. Kirkland was previously convicted of sexually soliciting another 13-year-old girl. And just last week, a warrant was issued for his arrest for failing to update his address as a sex offender.

Kirkland also is a suspect in two additional murders: one involving a 14-year-old girl and another involving a 45-year-old woman.

While Esme’s family and friends grieve, there are a lot of questions that need to be answered. Why was a dangerous convict like Kirkland allowed to roam the streets? Would Esme still be alive if Kirkland had registered his current address? And how can we prevent this from happening again?

This sad story is all too real for one of our witnesses today. Following the brutal murder of his own daughter, Mark Lunsford has engaged in a nationwide crusade to protect our children. He has fought for legislation to provide more stringent tracking of released sex offenders and has urged legislatures to adopt longer sentences for criminals who sexually abuse children.

This type of legislation—often called “Jessica’s Law” in remembrance of Mr. Lunsford’s daughter—has been introduced or adopted in 42 states, a real credit to him.

As we listen to testimony and consider Congressional action, we must remember Esme, Jessica and thousands of other young child-victims. We have a solemn duty to protect the most vulnerable among us. Congress should take additional steps to give law enforcement officials the tools they need to keep our children safe.

In 2006, Congress passed the Adam Walsh Act to better protect children from sexual predators. A number of the Adam Walsh Act grant programs that were authorized to help states improve sex-offender registration will expire at the end of this year.

These programs were established to enable the Justice Department and state and local law enforcement agencies to track and apprehend absconders from the Sex Offender Registry. Individuals like Anthony Kirkland.

That's why I and others introduced legislation to reauthorize these programs for the next five years. I am hopeful that after today's hearing, many of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle will join us as well.

One of the six programs reauthorized by this legislation is the Jessica Lunsford Address Verification Grant Program. This program provides grants to states, counties, cities, and Indian Tribes so they can verify the addresses of registered sex offenders.

Unfortunately, many of the Adam Walsh Act programs, including the Jessica Lunsford Grant program, have received insufficient or no direct funding from Congress.

Congress is willing to tackle the economic crisis and budget issues. But we should not lose sight of other Congressional priorities. Keeping children safe from sexual predators is not about partisan politics, it's about children like Esme, Jessica and the thousands of other child-victims nationwide.

Today, we should begin a bipartisan effort that will help protect children tomorrow. It is my hope that as a result of sex offender registration legislation, fewer families will have to face the loss of a child in the future.

###